

The Bible Student.

CONTINUING

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It was in the first bloom of that reaction against sound religious thought which trod on the heels of the moral corruption of the Restoration and the decline in earnestness in the Church of England accompanying that decay of manners, that the British world was startled by the publication of an anonymous little treatise called *Christianity not Mysterious* (1696). It was the work of a theological adventurer named JOHN TOLAND. His object was not to vindicate the claims of Christianity to the reasonable consideration of men; nor yet to develop the *rationale* of its distinctive teachings; nor to expound the elements and exhibit the adaptation to man's nature and condition of that "wisdom of God in a mystery," which hitherto hidden, was at length revealed to the apostles by the Spirit, and so transmitted to us. His object, on the contrary, was to declare that nothing that seemed to him mysterious was a part of Christianity—that its whole content is "reasonable," in the sense that it is level to and not above reason. Meanwhile he was loud in his asseverations that

his alembic left all the "essentials of Christianity" untouched. A generation later (1730), when the Deistic movement had attained its height, it fruited in the more mature work of MATTHEW TINDAL, also published anonymously, and never finished, which bears the title of *Christianity as Old as Creation*. It did not trace Christianity back into the eternal counsels of the Godhead and show how from the beginning, in the purposes of the Divine love, all its glorious provisions of mercy lay prepared; nor did it begin with the great promise of the Seed at the gate of Eden, and exhibit the gospel latent in the Old Testament even from the first. Its alternative title already betrays its quite contrary purport: *Or, it reads, the Gospel a Republication of the Religion of Nature*. His design was, the author tells us, to strip religion "of the additions which policy, mistake, and the circumstances of the time have made to it," and so to restore it to a form in which it is worthy of an "infinitely wise and good God." This is, of course, his euphemism for the discharge from Christianity of all that makes it Christianity as distinguished from

THE FEAST OF JOHN V.

The determination of the Jewish feast which Jesus attended, according to the statement of the fifth chapter of John's gospel, is well known to be a problem about which New Testament scholars are still far from being agreed. At that feast the impotent man lying by the pool of Bethesda was healed; and since the cure occurred on the Sabbath, it gave rise to a vigorous discussion between the Jewish rulers and Jesus concerning his authority, which led to one of the most sublime disclosures by the Lord of his consciousness of union with the Father, of the mission on which he had come from heaven, and of the evidences for his Messiahship, which even the fourth gospel itself contains. These teachings of course retain their value, whatever the feast at which they were spoken. But the student of Christ's life must ever be interested to decide what feast it was, because on the decision turns the length of the Lord's public ministry and our idea also of the length and progress of that part of the ministry which was spent in lower Galilee.

It is well known that we are dependent on John's gospel for our knowledge of the length of Christ's ministry as a whole. In the Synoptic gospels only one passover is mentioned, viz: that at which Jesus died. So far as appears from them, his whole ministry might have been compressed into a year. This in fact was the opinion even of some of the early fathers. It would indeed be hard to believe that such was the case, in view of the impression which he produced in Judea as well as in Galilee; yet the Synoptists give us no positive data by which the contrary could be proved, though they are not without intimations which, in the light of John's gospel, can be so understood (see Lk. xiii, 7, Matt. xxiii, 37). The latter, however, mentions distinctly three passovers (II: 13, vi; 4, xii, 55). Shortly before the first of these Jesus was baptized and entered on his public work (Joh. I, 33); so that his ministry was at least two and a quarter years in length. John mentions other feasts which Jesus attended in Jerusalem; the feast of Tabernacles (vii. 2), and that of Dedication (x. 22). These, however, fell between the Passover of vi. 4 and that of xii. 55, in the last year of the ministry. But to the feast of Chapter

V., the evangelist gives no name. If it, too, was a passover, then the ministry was three and a quarter years in length. If it was not, then the two and a quarter year theory remains unchanged.

Moreover, the feast of John V. must be inserted in the narrative of the Synoptic gospels. Now it is to be noted that at this feast the Lord was specifically charged with violation of the Sabbath, and that this was the ground of his persecution by the rulers in Jerusalem and the occasion of his defence of his divine authority. When we turn to the Synoptists, we find the Sabbath controversy suddenly emerging after the Galilean work of Jesus had progressed for some little time (Mk. ii, 23, iii, 6, Mt. xii, 1-14, Lk. vi, 1-11). The Pharisees are described as first criticizing Jesus and his disciples, and then specially watching the Lord to see if he would heal on the Sabbath-day; but no explanation is given of how they came to suspect that he was likely to do this. It is quite clear, therefore, that the feast of John V. occurred before these incidents related by the Synoptists and provides the natural explanation of them. Hence it must have taken place after the Galilean ministry had progressed for at least some little time, long enough for the events related in Mark i, 16-ii, 22, to have occurred. The determination of this feast, therefore, decides the date to be assigned to the beginning of Christ's Galilean work. Since, moreover, the Passover of Jno. vi. 4, took place at the time of the feeding of the five thousand, all the events related by Mark from ii. 23-vi. 30, together with the material for the same period furnished by Matthew and Luke, must be placed between the feast of John v. and the Passover of John vi.; so that again the determination of the former will decide the length of time in which this large body of material is to be placed. It is thus a matter of exceptional importance to the student of Christ's life to fix, if possible, this "unnamed feast."

Now it is first to be noted that John's reference to the feast is singularly, and it would seem intentionally, indefinite. He calls it merely "*a* feast of the Jews." Some ancient manuscripts indeed insert the definite article and read "*the* feast of the Jews" (see Revised Version, margin), and Tischendorf, in the eighth edition of his Greek Testament, follows this reading. Were this correct, there would be little doubt that the Passover, the pre-eminent feast of the Jews, was meant. But the preference is to be

given decidedly to the reading, followed by Westcott and Hort and by both the Authorized and Revised Versions, which omits the definite article. So far, therefore, as the text is concerned, the character of the feast is an open question.

But it is to be further observed that the evangelist is not only indefinite in his mention of the feast, but that throughout the entire chapter there is no hint of what feast it was. This is remarkable, because in every other instance he is careful to give the very names of the feasts with which his narrative dealt. His omission of any description of this feast would seem, therefore, to have had a reason. Can that reason be learned? In reply, we notice that in the other instances the name of the feast was given apparently because something had been or was to be narrated, the significance of which was explained or illustrated by the particular character of the feast in question. Thus in ii. 13, attention is called to the fact that it was the Passover that Jesus attended, because it was appropriate for him then to first offer himself to the nation, and because of the cleansing of the temple by which he inaugurated his ministry. In vi. 4, again the Passover is mentioned, partly because its occurrence explained the great multitude of Galileans assembled, doubtless preparing to go to Jerusalem, and partly because of the discourse, based on the feeding of the five thousand, wherein Jesus presented himself as the true bread of life and spake of eating his flesh and drinking his blood as the condition of possessing eternal life, a discourse in which he practically presented himself as the antitype of the passover. In vii. 2 it is mentioned that "the feast of Tabernacles was at hand;" and we may believe that attention is thus called to the feast because of its character as a "feast pre-eminently for foreign pilgrims when their temple contributions were received and counted" (Ederheim *Life and Times of Jesus*, ii. 143) and the great ceremony of pouring water from Siloam on the altar, illustrated the teaching of Jesus at that time (see vii. 35 and 37). So the mention of the feast of Dedication in x. 22 is, with the following notice that "it was winter," intended to explain how Jesus came to be walking in Solomon's porch. Finally, the feast at which Jesus was crucified is named as the Passover (xii. 55) to explain the assemblage of the people in Jerusalem, and also because of the associations of the passover with the meaning of Jesus' death, as it was especially

felt by the fourth evangelist (xix. 36). All this makes John's vagueness with reference to the feast of Chapter v. the more remarkable. But it seems also to suggest the explanation. *There was nothing in the cure of the impotent man nor in the discourse to which it led which was at all illustrated by the nature of the feast at which it occurred.* There was thus no especial reason for John to name the feast. Hence it would appear that he was intentionally indefinite. We are, therefore, aided in its determination neither by the textual nor the exegetical considerations which bear on the passage. The indefiniteness of John's language cannot be used to prove that it was *not* a passover; for the indefiniteness arose solely because his narrative did not call for the mention of the name of the feast. The question still remains an open one. We must look in other directions for the answer, if it is to be obtained at all.

The only remaining line of investigation which promises fruitful results is a consideration of what feast this was most likely to have been in view of what we otherwise know of the movement of Christ's life in its earlier portion, and on what hypothesis, with respect to this feast, can the progress of the early Judean and Galilean ministries be made to appear most natural and most in accordance with other indications.

Now in John ii. 13 we find Jesus at his first passover, which we shall assume was that of A. D. 27. This was in April. After the passover he remained in Judea (Jno. iii. 22), preaching repentance like John the Baptist, until his growing success among the people advised him that he was likely to be made a rival of John's. This led him to depart into Galilee (Jno. iv. 1-3). But how long did this early ministry in Judea last? Some, like Ederheim, believe that it lasted but a few weeks; that on his return to Galilee in the early summer of that year, he began his Galilean ministry; and that he returned, according to John v., to one of the feasts which occurred later in that year. Ederheim conjectures it to have been the feast of Wood-gathering, in August, or, as does also Westcott, the feast of Trumpets in September (*Life and Times of Jesus*, Append. xv.) But against this and similar views is the difficulty that according to Jno. iv. 35, when about to enter Galilee, Jesus said to his disciples "Say not ye, There are yet four months and then cometh the harvest?" This expression cannot

be a proverb, for, not to say that we know of no such Jewish proverb, it would not have any sense as a proverb. It must, therefore, be an indication of the time when the words were uttered. But the harvest in Palestine fell between passover and Pentecost (April to May). Four months before that time would bring us to December. It would seem evident, therefore, that the Lord's early Judean ministry lasted much longer than Edersheim supposes. It must have lasted from April to December, A. D. 27; and consequently none of the feasts of that year can have been the one of John v. Our unnamed feast, therefore, must be sought in the following year, A. D. 28. It is natural to seek it in the early part of that year, since otherwise we would have a period, at the beginning of the Galilean ministry, too long for the few events that can be assigned to it. Hence most scholars have maintained that it must have been either Purim (in March) or the Passover (in April); and between the claims of these two the discussion may be said practically to lie. A strong array of names might be cited for each view. But, not to go too much into details, there are two cogent reasons for not believing the feast to have been Purim. (1) In the first place, Purim was not a Mosaic feast nor observed by pilgrimages to Jerusalem. It is improbable, therefore, that Christ broke in upon his growing work in Galilee to go to Jerusalem at such a time. (2) If this were Purim, and if it marked, as we have already seen that it did, the outbreak of the Sabbath controversy, then all the events of the Galilean ministry subsequent to that controversy up to the feeding of the five thousand (viz. Mark iii. 7-vi. 30, with the corresponding portions of Matthew and Luke) must be crowded into one month, since we know from John vi. 4 that the feeding of the five thousand was at the time of the following Passover. This must strike every one as an highly improbable arrangement. It would allow a wholly insufficient time for the development of the teaching of Jesus in Galilee and for the wide impression which he made there.

We are thus led to the view that the unnamed feast may have been the Passover of A. D. 28; and in addition to the exclusion of previous feasts by the arguments already given, positive reasons for this identification are not wanting.

In the first place, the Passover was a feast which Jesus would

be likely to attend in Jerusalem, if it were possible for him to do so. It was the most sacred of all the feasts. It was one which he had been trained from his childhood to observe in the holy city (Lk. ii. 41). It was peculiarly associated with the fulfilment of the chief purpose for which he had entered on his mission. The fact that according to John vi. 4, etc., he evidently did not attend the passover there mentioned, was due to the necessity at that time of preventing the open conflict which would have probably ensued if he had gone at the height of his Galilean ministry to the capital; and should not be thought to lessen the probability that at the earlier period he did attend the same feast in accordance with his custom.

In the second place, if we assume the feast of John v. to have been the Passover of A. D. 28, then the Passover of John vi. 4 was of course that of the following year, A. D. 29. We thus obtain a whole year for the progress of Christ's Galilean ministry from the outbreak of the Sabbath controversy to the feeding of the five thousand, instead of one month, as on the Purim theory. This affords abundant time for the work which the Lord accomplished in Galilee, for the unfolding of his teaching and for the wide and deep impression which he is known to have made in the entire community, not only in Galilee, but throughout the whole of Palestine.

Still further, the assumption that the feast of John v. was a passover accounts for the fact, noted by all the Synoptists (Mark iii. 7, 8, Lk. vi. 17, Matt. xii. 15-21), that, along with the outbreak of the Sabbath controversy, Jesus appears to have been sought by a great multitude of people from all parts of Palestine, and even from regions beyond. This assemblage in Galilee of inquirers and spectators from widely scattered portions of the land can hardly be explained merely by his success in Galilee. It was doubtless the result also of the fame he attained in Jerusalem at the "un-named feast." If so, that was most probably one of the great feasts to which persons from the whole country and even from the regions beyond ascended. Hence it must have been Passover rather than Purim.

Finally, the first incident of the Sabbath controversy mentioned by all the Synoptists (Matt. xiii. 1-8, Mk. ii. 23-28, Lk. vi. 1-5) was the plucking and eating by the disciples of the ears of grain on the

Sabbath day. We have already noted that this must have followed the feast of John v., since the cure of the impotent man on the Sabbath led to the first charge against Jesus of being a Sabbath-breaker and explains the suspicions of the Pharisees concerning his attitude toward the Sabbath, which we find suddenly appearing in the Synoptics. But the fact that the disciples plucked and ate the ears of grain implies that the grain was ripe, and, therefore, that the harvest season was at hand. The harvest, however, as already remarked, fell between Passover and Pentecost. Hence it again becomes altogether probable that the feast of John v., which thus must have been shortly previous to or at the very beginning of the harvest, was none other than a Passover.

The probabilities of the case, therefore, decidedly point, we think, to the view that the feast in question was the Passover of A. D. 28. We have already shown that the vagueness with which John describes it is not a sufficient objection to this view, for the vagueness was due to reasons lying within the purpose of his narrative, not to any wish to represent the feast as an unimportant one. Of course we can not regard the determination of the feast as demonstrated. The possibility of mistakes must be admitted. The result can only be regarded as the most probable one. But we feel the probability to be so strong as to constrain us to build our construction of Christ's ministry upon it. If so, his ministry was three years and a quarter in length; the early Judean ministry extended from April to December, A. D. 27; the early Galilean ministry from December, A. D. 27, to April, A. D. 29; and the feast of John v., being the Passover of A. D. 28, is to be inserted in the Synoptic narrative after the account of Matthew's feast (Mark ii. 17, Lk. v. 29, Mt. ix. 10), or at least after the call of Matthew, with which the account of his feast and Christ's discourse on fasting is connected by the Synoptists, and before the account of the outbreak of the Sabbath controversy.

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